Volume 1.
Number 17.

Week of
December 16, 1940

Critics'

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"Every Man for Himself"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *December 10, 1940*

Every Man for Himself, Hollywood Farce, Opens

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

Certainly it cannot be a coincidence that four terrible plays should come out of Hollywood within the space of a month, and with the arrival last night at the Guild Theater of Every Man for Himself I am convinced that some sort of epidemic is raging behind the studio doors out there. I propose a strict quarantine.

The indictment found against the first of the four unfortunate plays, Beverly Hills, was that it was commonplace, dull and artificial. Of Quiet Please, the second, the worst that could be said was that it was incredible hokum. Glamour Preferred, third in the list, was obnoxious when it was not boring and vice versa.

If, now, you subtract all the microscopic virtues of those three plays and add together all of their obvious deficiencies, you have the sum total of Every Man for Himself, the new farce by Milton Lazarus, which Lee Tracy and a company that seemed to have been overheated by the Klieg lights have come 3000 miles to play for us.

* * *

It is common gossip that Mr. Lazarus' play has been knocked down and reassembled several times, and this must be so because in its finished state it is a theatrical crazy quilt, a patchwork of gangsterism, bedroom farce and Hollywood manners.

If, out of the confusion on the stage, the gallopings up and down stairs, the babble of conversation, the noise of earthquakes and police sirens, it is possible to detect a lucid story, Mr. Lazarus' general idea is this:

A despondent scenario writer has been on a four-day binge, and in the course of the long mental blackout he has married a beautiful girl. When he comes to he discovers that the girl is the ward of an ex-gangster who is also in love with her and that she is at the same time the fiancee of the movie producer to whom he owes his bread and butter. Mr. Lazarus solves the problem of the gangster by having him arrested just before the final curtain. What he is going to do about the disappointed producer I have no idea nor do I very much care.

* * *

That sounds like a fairly simple plot. But Mr. Lazarus has cluttered it up with crazy sound engineers and their balmy wives, with female movie tramps, potty renting agents and other unhappy characters, and he has run these creatures in and out of so many impossible situations and at such incredible speed that it looks like a chase scene from a 1914 Keystone comedy.

* * *

Mr. Tracy's return to the stage is not, accordingly, auspicious, nor can it be said that by any prodigious force of acting he raises the play above its natural level. He is glib and speaks the senseless lines with rapid-fire efficiency.

There was, however, one bright spot in an otherwise dismal evening. Miss Margaret Tallichet, making her first New York appearance, is lovely to look at and plays with a warmth and feeling that are worthy of better parts. The others in the cast, presumably at the direction of Arthur Ripley, mistook noise for humor and frenzy for action.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *December 10, 1940*

Lee Tracy in "Every Man for Himself"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IT WAS Kelcy Allen's suggestion that someone—a public enemy no doubt—must be offering a prize this season for the worst play written about Hollywood. Now that "Every Man for Himself" has entered the lists as a competitor with "Beverly Hills," "Glamour Preferred," and "Quiet Please!" Mr. Allen's lobby fancy begins to seem like an established fact.

It would, of course, be difficult for anyone to determine with accuracy just which of these four scripts would deserve the dishonor of being crowned with such a wreath of poison ivy. My suspicion is that the most impartial judge would be tempted to toss the garland to any of the four that he had just seen. If, however, this same Daniel-come-to-judgment had given away his prize before surviving Milton Lazarus' new farce at the Guild, he would have been only human had he snatched it back in order to bestow it anew.

Lee Tracy, who is affectionately remembered hereabouts for his contributions to "The Show-Off," "Broadway," and "The Front Page," returned last night to the local stage after a five-year absence to struggle ineffectually against the odds of a hopeless script. Mr. Tracy was supposed to be a Hollywood scenarist who, when he had sobered up, could not recall the wonderful plot idea he had sold during a four-day drunk. Girls, gangsters, house-guests, real estate agents, and bill-collectors were among worries which inundated him, and the audience, too.

But, though everyone worked hard—oh, very, very hard, indeed—and though Charlie Williams often seemed on the verge of becoming funny, the evening grew sadder and sadder while attempting to become madder and madder. The worst of it was that much of the acting was on the same level as the writing. Damon and Pythias could not have got along better.

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"Every Man for Himself"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *December 10, 1940*

'Every Man for Himself,' With Lee Tracy, Opens at the Guild Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

LEE TRACY, who went West some years ago to grow up with the movies, came back last evening and worked himself to a frazzle at the Guild Theater in a farce by Milton Lazarus called "Every Man for Himself." Mr. Tracy remains tart, vigorous and amusing, thus differing in almost every respect from "Every Man for Himself."

Mr. Tracy portrays a writer, marooned in Hollywood, although he would dearly love to return East and do something really good. But "Every Man for Himself" is not primarily about life in Hollywood, already so diligently surveyed by our staggering theater. "Every Man for Himself" is about a man who draws a blank during a four-day outing and comes to himself in dinner clothes and in trouble. Many things happened while his memory lapsed. He brought home a beautiful girl, invited some friends to live with him, sold a story which he cannot remember and listened to the confidences of a reformed, but still pretty gruff, gangster.

Mr. Lazarus had a good deal of trouble getting this tangled properly, and for the most of the first act about all that can be said is that Mr. Tracy is in there swinging. (Mr. Lazarus may have taken his title a thought too literally.) Eventually plots thicken, numerous characters are shepherded by grim public enemies; every one dashes madly up and down a convenient flight of stairs. Hurried physical movement is achieved and some jokes crackle.

But it is never much of a farce. It seems merely hurried where it should seem fast; scrambled foolishness instead of intricately meshed absurdity. It evokes faint smiles instead of the roars upon which farce depends. In fewer words, it just isn't very funny.

Mr. Tracy not only works hard. He also works expertly and if he sometimes seems to be beating the empty air the fault is obviously his author's. Margaret Tallichet is very lovely; Wally Maher and Charles A. Hughes glumly threatening, and all the rest full of activity and enthusiasm. It begins to look, however, as if playwrights will be better off if they simply forget Hollywood entirely.

'EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF'

A farce in three acts by Milton Lazarus; directed by Arthur Ripley; presented at the Guild Theater on December 9, 1940, by Arthur Hutchinson and Mr. Ripley. The cast:

Al	Murray Alper
Wally Britt	Lee Tracy
Sneeden	David Hoffman
Elizabeth	Kay Linaker
Mel	Charlie Williams
Janey	Beryl Vaughan
York	John Gallaudet
Helen	Margaret Tallichet
Mrs. Ramsey	Jeanne Seel
Man	Martin Myers
Woman	Geneva Keenan
Rittenhoff	Wally Maher
Grogan	Charles A. Hughes
Humphrey Harrison	Grant Richards
Dr. Lane	Richard Bartell
Mrs. Lane	Gerry Brent
Little Boy	Billy Curtis
Officer	Westley Givens
Dolan	Edgar Roland Murray
Wally's Uncle	George Roberts

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *December 10, 1940*

"Every Man for Himself" And Hollywood Gets the Hindmost

"Every Man for Himself," farce comedy by Milton Lazarus. Produced by Arthur Hutchinson and Arthur Ripley at the Guild Theatre, New York, Dec. 9, 1940.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

I SUSPECT they whip up these Hollywood comedies for their own amusement out there in Beverly Hills. The newest of them, which is the "Every Man for Himself" that Lee Tracy brought to the Guild Theatre last night, is filled with local allusions and recognizable caricatures—or seemed to be to those Hollywood expatriates in the audience.

That is one reason the average studio rumpus has a hard time on Broadway. Just as a particularly pat George Kaufman-Moss Hart Broadway number often seems to puzzle rather than to dazzle Hollywood.

"Every Man for Himself," written by Milton Lazarus, is a lightly confused farcical romp. It is pretty dull most of the time, but picks up with an assortment of accumulated complications and finishes more expertly than it begins.

Its chief weakness as a fun show is the familiar weakness of most farce—the obviousness of its pattern and the labored effort of its players to disguise it.

Down Memory Lane

In this instance we are presumed to get measurably worked up over the dilemma of Wally Britt, a young scenarist who has been drunk for four days and has forgotten the story he outlined and sold to a producer on horseback—or at least in riding breeches—while he was drinking.

Also during his spree Wally has accumulated a number of other problems, including a pretty one who walks out of his bedroom in his other pajamas.

Somewhere, too, he has taken on a New York Public Enemy No. 1 who shoots from the pocket and threatens from the eyebrows.

Practically everyone wants to marry the pajama problem, including our hero, his producer and the Public Enemy. Which gums things up for a couple of hours.

Mr. Tracy, it seems to me, was never cut out for a romantic, even in farce. He is one of the rough boys who can play reporters—especially opposition reporters—realistically and with a lot of spirit. But the soft stuff rather embarrasses him.

Tracy's Return

He has brought on a group of his California playmates to help him retake Broadway. (He had it, you may recall, as the editor in "The Front Page" and the hoofer in "Broadway.")

These include pretty Margaret Tallichet, the aforementioned pajama problem. Margaret is small, feminine and capable. Another is Wally Maher, who plays the gangster as naturally as though he had had a long Broadway experience, which he hasn't had.

Charlie Williams is a scampering foil and Grant Richards a good standin for Humphrey Bogart as a screen toughie. The others include Beryl Vaughan, Kay Linaker and Murray Alper.

Arthur Hutchinson, one producer, built the scenery, a handsome Hollywood interior designed by Ernest Glover, and Arthur Ripley, the other producer, did the directing. This, I'd say, is keeping everything well in hand.

"Every Man for Himself"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE, *December 10, 1940*

Hollywood Again

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

THAT Hollywood play is in again. This time it is enlivened by Lee Tracy's customarily engaging performance and a couple of potentially good satirical ideas, but it is the same old feeble comedy, foolish, frantic and fatuous. The story of an alcoholic scenario writer who cannot remember the plot he has sold to a polo-playing film producer, "Every Man for Himself" mixes gangsters with the usual flora and fauna of Southern California studio life and provides us with another of the season's mounting list of mishaps. I wish I could say a good word about the new work, not only because it brings Mr. Tracy back after too long an absence, but also because it graciously spares us the plot about the amorous actor husband and his faithful actress wife. Yet, despite the advantages, it is, I must repeat, just another Hollywood play, and pretty dismal.

* * *

The play begins promisingly enough, with Mr. Tracy awaking unhappily after a drinking session of three or four days, and seeming very heartfelt about it. He has sold his story to the big producer, but he cannot remember what the story was all about. He finds a pretty girl roaming about the house in his pajamas and he can't remember who she is or where she came from. A gangster arrives in properly menacing fashion, and Mr. Tracy cannot recall what his relations with him were, either. In fact, he is in an excellent spot for some good farcical complications, and when the narrative is going in for satirical pseudo-Pirandello conflicts between gangsters from life and gangsters from the films, it seems that the playwright may have something. In fact, in one scene where the producer who had thought up so many good gangster adventures meets the actual gang leader and sneers at him for his lack of imagination, you are on the verge of creditable farce. But even such potentially good ideas are wrecked by clumsy writing and inadequate staging.

* * *

It is such a pleasure to have Mr. Tracy back with us that it seems particularly ungracious to speak harshly of his vehicle. One of the best and most likable of American actors, the man who was so wonderful in "Broadway" and "The Front Page" is the sort of player that the theater should treasure, and it is absurd that he should stay away so long and then be forced to return in so inadequate a comedy. All I can say is that, although he is called upon to labor a bit violently at times, he is once more a joy to watch, and I hope he will not get back to Hollywood before he is captured for another role. There is a pleasant heroine in the person of Miss Margaret Tallichet, and the other players are, in most cases, good enough, or a little more. But "Every Man for Himself" wastes what opportunities it has and ends without happiness for any one concerned. Has any one else got a Hollywood play on hand? Don't tell me if you know of one.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *December 10, 1940*

Lee Tracy Impersonates a Heavy Drinker in a Hollywood Farce, 'Every Man for Himself'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

FOR five years New York has been normal and peaceful. Last evening Lee Tracy catapulted himself back to town in a Hollywood farce, "Every Man for Himself," which was put on at the Guild Theatre. As the hero in Milton Lazarus's rag-tag and bob-tail, Mr. Tracy finds himself impersonating a heavy drinker who occasionally breaks out in a stupendous spree. A nervous and dynamic actor, who is not afraid to be caught moving on the stage, he revolves at high speed through a crack-brained antic, teetering on whatever moonbeams the author has strung from here to there. "Every Man for Himself" is most amusing in the early half of the evening before it turns the plot over to a different character. In the third act Mr. Tracy is comparatively quiet and silent, which is a style of acting that taxes his virtuosity.

* * *

Mr. Lazarus begins his farce affably enough with the dazed apprehensions of a high-pressure Hollywood writer who is just coming to after an epochal bender. No one knows less about what he has been up to than the writer. Although he went out in a tweed suit he returns in dinner clothes wearing another man's overcoat and trundling a musical cradle. He has interested a movie producer in the plot of a story he can no longer remember. Out of his bedroom comes a lovely female stranger, wearing his pajamas and radiant with grateful memories.

* * *

With that as a promising invitation to insanity, Mr. Lazarus plunges into a tale about a reformed gangster who is in love and keeps a revolver in his pocket to prove it. A good deal of it is pretty funny. The situation keeps changing violently all evening. But there comes a time when uproar for its own sake is no longer amusing but a labored attempt to whip up amusement that has really departed.

In addition to Mr. Tracy, who must have a feeling that he is passing himself from time to time, the cast includes Murray Alper, Margaret Tallichet, Grant Richards and Wally Maher and Charles A. Hughes as plug-uglies in gentlemen's attire. On the whole, the performance is without distinction, except for Mr. Tracy, who has collided with New York again. It is hoped that during his sojourn here he will remember that the town is not quite so strong as it used to be. It is an easy bruiser now.

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† *"Delicate Story" opened last Wedensday, December 4th, at the Henry Miller Theatre.*
† *"Mum's the Word" opened last Thursday, December 5th, at the Belmont Theatre.*

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"Mum's the Word"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *December 6, 1940*

Jimmy Savo Seen in "Mum's the Word"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALONE, or rather almost alone, but certainly not unobserved, Jimmy Savo went through a full evening of his paces at the Belmont last night. "Mum's the Word" is the name he has given his solo show. And mum he remains, except for some lyrics which he occasionally bleats in that thin little voice of his which can be as full of pathos as the insufficient melody tinkled by a child's toy.

Silence, however, is no enemy of a man like Mr. Savo when he has something to say. His pantomime is singularly eloquent. As he wanders from number to number, leaving the audience between times in charge of such a capable chaperon as Hiram Sherman, Mr. Savo's gestures can do the duty of a full thesaurus.

Mr. Savo is, of course, that little gray-faced comic, with the derby, the dewy black eyes, the cigar stub, the high collar, the black tie, the long expanse of shirt front, the dropped waistline, the baggy pants, and the great black shoes, who for years (in and out of the Palace) used to urge, with genuine heartbreak, an ever-rising river to stay away from his door. Fortunately last night in an encore he permitted that river to rise once again and imperil him in one of the really magnificent pantomimic numbers of our time.

An Extraordinary Performer

All solo performers run the risk of being monotonous before an evening is over. Doubtless there are those who will find Mr. Savo's program lacking in variety. But I must admit that, while I hated such a number as "Yes-man at a Royal Court" and winced during "Bourgeois Gentilhomme—a Contribution to Molière," I had a pleasant time at "Mum's the Word," especially during the first half.

Mr. Savo, at his best, is the last great silent movie. The only difference is that he happens to be seen in person. His magic, though more profane, is very definitely Chaplinesque in its quality. It benefits by the same sense of the ridiculous, can show the same imagination, and is backed by the same stabbing sense of heartbreak.

As Mr. Savo circles about the stage in "Mum's the Word," suggesting a Swedish maiden, clowning Kathy from Cathay, indulging in the fearsome but hilarious brutalities of a hospital porter turned surgeon, indicating a washerwoman in love, creating an Eve who is the last word in broad parody, impersonating a sinful fisherman at sea, or bruising the emotions by the sudden poignancy of his hungry man in the Bowery or his Negro singing "Ole Man River," he often seems a rowdy figure out of burlesque who just happens to have the sensibilities of an artist.

Out of burlesque? Out of the circus, too. And also out of the apostolic succession of great clowns. His present performance is one that I dreaded—and enjoyed. It may be no ordinary show. But the simple, and important, fact is that Mr. Savo is no ordinary entertainer.

Only a man touched with genius would have thought of having his "men's smoker" Eve, in her pink union suit, start treating her long locks of hair as if they were, first, wool to be knitted, and, then, spaghetti to be eaten. But then only a man touched with genius would have thought of many of the small details of which Mr. Savo is a master. Or excel to his extent in comic timing. I, for one, thank him for "Mum's the Word"; at least for a large part of it, and congratulate Mr. Sherman and Mr. Kingsley for their share in it.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *December 6, 1940*

Jimmy Savo's High Humor Rampant in One-Man Revue

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

LATE last summer I watched Jimmy Savo, the banjo-eyed Merry Andrew, tripping with big but graceful feet through the tulips of a stage at Ridgefield, Conn., in a shakedown—a truthfully expressive word for it, by the way—of his one-man revue called Mum's the Word. The revue, after many revisions, arrived last night at the intimate little Belmont Theater, and Mr. Savo is now launched, successfully I hope, on a new and independent career.

At the time of the Ridgefield incident, I felt that the joy of Mr. Savo's pantomime might be tempered only by the chance of poor selection from his vast collection of humorous items. This slight fear was dissipated last night, for the 10 sketches on his program seem to have been chosen carefully. Broad, perhaps, and some of them not exactly subtle. But funny.

Mr. Savo's acts are introduced by Hiram Sherman, one of the most genial and helpful masters-of-unceremony I know, and the comedian has no other supporting company except Herbert Kingsley, who plays the piano, a silent man who plays the part of a chestnut vendor, and 14 stagehands.

* * *

He has refrained, happily I think, from including too much pathos in his show. In only one scene, the one depicting a starving man tortured by the odor of roasting chestnuts, does he play heavily upon the laugh-clown-laugh theme. The others are the pure abandon of a happy clown and a master of pantomime.

I was going to say that in addition to pantomime Mr. Savo raises his voice in song. That would be incorrect, unless it were explained that he raises it to the volume of a whisper, and that the songs are merely minor aids to the pantomime rather than the other way around.

It must be admitted, nevertheless, that Mr. Savo is at his best in the old familiar routines, skipping, gliding, tripping in his baggy pants, enjoying the stogie that waves like a conductor's baton from his generous mouth, popping his head in turtle fashion from his prodigious collar, leering delightfully in all directions at once—the good old Savo.

The funniest, although to some it may be the most brazen, of his sketches is one that concerns the ghoulish operations of a hospital porter who happens to be left alone with a patient. His excavating work produces bursting balloons, bricks and a Punch and Judy show, although the latter may be merely an illusion, caused by the liquor the porter has drunk to steady his nerves sufficiently to wield the surgeon's knife.

* * *

His impersonation of A Bourgeois Gentilhomme (after Molière—by a great many years) was extremely engaging, though a trifle long. His adventure on a fishing boat, culminating in a romance with a mermaid, also had its points of high humor. As a concluding piece, he produced a new sketch—new to me, at least—designed to illustrate the difficulties of a court jester trying to amuse his sovereign at the risk of losing his head if he fails.

Altogether, there are more laughs in Jimmy Savo's show than in half a dozen average comedies. Incidentally, I think the Belmont Theater is exactly the friendly little theater to house them. The laughter doesn't wander around until it gets lost, as it might in a more expansive auditorium.

"Mum's the Word"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *December 6, 1940*

"Mum's the Word," But Jimmy Savo Also Tries to Sing a Little

"Mum's the Word," series of sketches in pantomime by Jimmy Savo. Produced by Mr. Savo at the Belmont Theatre, New York, Dec. 5, 1940.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

A GOOD deal of wishful planning finally brought Jimmy Savo to the Belmont Theatre last night as his own producer, his own director, his own author and practically his own company. He calls his entertainment "Mum's the Word."

He has been threatening this one-man show ever since he tried it at Walter Hartwig's Theatre in Ogunquit last Summer. Even before that he did a lot of talking about it.

It is his idea to give a sort of pantomime recital, as the Ruth Drapers and Cornelia Otis Skinners give their mono-dramas. For this purpose he has either assembled or created ten burlesque bits that range from such ludicrous studies as one of Mother Eve in a baggy union suit with a fig leaf sewed on it to a couple of presumably pathetic studies of a starving man on the Bowery and an overworked farmhand down South. Occasionally he drops into song, but shyly, as though he were afraid he might be heard.

It is an entertainment for Savo fans. The little clown undoubtedly has his moments, but I am afraid an hour and a half of him is an hour too much. Well, let's settle for three-quarters of an hour, then.

'MUM'S THE WORD'

A revue, consisting entirely of Jimmy Savo; music by various composers, "tampered with" by Mr. Savo; "verbal annotations" by Hiram Sherman. There are twelve scenes and the cast consists of Mr. Savo, a dummy and an unidentified stooge. Presented by Mr. Savo at the Belmont Theater on December 5, 1940.

Good Pantomimist

His feeling for pantomime is definite, but he lacks variety in both the creation and performance of his skits. His humor is as broad as burlesque, never as subtle as satire.

His squinting eyes; his bland, wax-like smile; his baggy pants and low-gear lope about the stage are his stock in trade. These tricks serve him better when he makes short appearances in a revue than they do when one follows another in this one-man show and there is little essential difference between them.

Hiram Sherman is helping out as a verbal annotator. Hiram is intelligent and interesting under any circumstances, and he enlivens the Savo evening. Will enliven it more as he goes along. If "Mum's the Word" goes along with him.

Herbert Kingsley played piano accompaniments. There was a good deal of laughter last night, and one or two cases of mild hysteria in the front rows. At the conclusion of the show there were calls for "Old Man River," one of the more familiar Savo items. Jimmy obliged and then took his bows, which were friendly and numerous.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *December 6, 1940*

Jimmy Savo Puts On a One-Man Pantomimic Show Entitled 'Mum's the Word' in Ten Numbers at the Belmont Theatre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SINCE no one appears to be able to use Jimmy Savo properly on the revue stage, Jimmy is joyfully taking things into his own hands, eyes and feet. He is presenting himself in a one-man pantomimic show with songs, "Mum's the Word," which relighted the miniature Belmont last evening. Jimmy is wonderful. Nearly every one who loves pantomime has recognized his great talent for years, and has occasionally had the opportunity of admiring it in "The Boys From Syracuse," "Parade," the "Vanities" of 1930 (when Jimmy was pinched for keeping bad company) and John Murray Anderson's "Almanac."

Although the one-man show is a formidable prospect for idle theatre-going, Jimmy's bouyant personality and his silent eloquence make "Mum's the Word" a rare and lovable evening in the theatre. For Jimmy belongs in the company of the aristocrats of the profession—Charlie Chaplin, Joe Jackson and the well-remembered Frères Fratellini. Most of us have been Savoyards for years.

• • •

Nothing in the show improves upon the ragged, skipping little figure that has long been singing "Have You Ever Seen a Dream Walking?" and "River Stay Away From My Door" with something approaching ecstacy. The gleaming eyes, the shiny, bulging cheeks, the cheerful mouth, the battered derby and clerical collar still represent the apotheosis of Jimmy. Swinging happily across the stage with a radiantly innocent expression he is something worth cherishing in the imaginative literature of the stage. Most of the people in the audience held fast last evening until he had danced his dream and shoved the river away from his door.

But his fairy-story mind has been working on other ideas. As a Swedish maiden with grotesquely long tresses, he dances lyrically among prop flowers in a field. A washerwoman in love, he fondles a union suit rhapsodically as he dreams of romance. Wearing a brocaded costume of Molière's time, he does better by "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" in a few minutes than he did by the whole play when he bravely tried to act it in Westport a few Summers ago. He has invented a funny finishing number, grabbing his rubbers and leaping out of the boat when a mermaid passes by. His most uproarious number is laid in a hospital operating room; he carves a patient open and rears back in alarm from what he sees inside. All this is continuously amusing. For Jimmy hops through with it a light step and bright little asides of confidence to the audience.

What is new to this theatergoer, however, is Jimmy's adventure in pathos. Once he sings "Old Man River" with hopeless exhaustion. As far as the music goes, he sings it badly, but his brief sketch of a worn-out dock worker is true and moving. And his sketch of a hungry vagrant on the Bowery, fascinated by a cart of roasting chestnuts, is a remarkable evocation of human misery, overflowing with the sort of sympathy that comes straight from the heart.

• • •

Jimmy's ideas are so simple that art seems like a pompous word to saddle on his show. Probably he is not a conscious artist at all. His misadventures in show business when he has tried to fit patterns that are not his own inventions show how limited his range is. But within his compass he is immensely talented. His child like imagination has considerable force. During his two pathetic numbers you hardly recognize in his drawn, haggard features the rounded, smiling cherub who bounces around so happily in tramp's attire. Excepting his frequent disarming and pleading gestures to divine powers above, Jimmy is virtually self-contained. Whatever he does comes spontaneously out of his guileless, friendly nature. As a pantomimist he can live off his own fat, which is considerable, until doomsday.

To dispel some of the awful calm that invariably hovers over a one-man show, Jimmy has persuaded Hiram Sherman to make some affable remarks between the various numbers. Mr. Sherman's affability is comically hospitable, but his remarks are labored. Herbert Kingsley, in a handsome dress-suit, presides grandly over the piano.

"Mum's the Word"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *December 6, 1940*

One-Man Revue

By RICHARD WATTS, Jr.

JIMMY SAVO is a comedian of originality and imagination. He is a likable little fellow, with a guileless air of innocence and the proper amount of baffled wistfulness. He has a gift for pantomime and he can sing a song in a manner that is strictly his own. He can, for example, render the popular old number called "River, Stay Away From My Door" with a sort of troubled, even apprehensive, plaintiveness that persuades you he is one of the great men of modern comedy. Spot him properly in a good revue or musical comedy and he is an entertainer of eminence. But a whole evening of this excellent Mr. Savo in a one-man show called "Mum's the Word" is, in my determined opinion, far too much of a good thing. Although he appears as any number of people, from Moliere's Bourgeois Gentilhomme to the Old Testament's Mother Eve, monotony first creeps in and then arrives with a rush, and a very fine comic unhappily becomes a bore.

• • •

Strictly speaking, "Mum's the Word" isn't a one-man revue at all. It has Hiram Sherman, who is a first-rate comedian in his own right and has a gift for seemingly impromptu chatting with an audience, doing what the program calls the "verbal annotations" of the show. That is, Mr. Sherman comes out between the numbers and does something or other about explaining the forthcoming sketch, a task which he performs with a bland good humor that is extremely helpful to the evening. In addition there is an accompanying pianist named Herbert Kingsley, as well as a highly anonymous actor who helps out in two of the episodes. These three industrious assistants, however, merely pave the way for Mr. Savo, who gives us twelve pantomimic episodes, which he enlivens with several songs. He does "Old Man River" with considerable earnestness, he is embarrassingly serious about a number called "Chestnut Man" and is, for most of the time, in a considerably lighter vein. But he still is at his best when he sings "River, Stay Away From My Door" as an encore.

• • •

Among the Savo impersonations are to be found a Swedish maiden, a Chinese girl, a hospital porter performing an operation, the aforementioned Mother Eve, the gentleman from Moliere, a seasick sailor, a starving Bowery tramp, an unhappy jester and the wistful vagabond who is the customary Savo character. Next to the time when he is singing his most famous song, he is, I suppose, at his best as Eve, the Bourgeois Gentilhomme and possibly the desperate jester who must make the king laugh or suffer decapitation. Decidedly he is at his most uncomfortable as the Bowery tramp who is finally reduced to eating his own newspaper. Here, I think, is the second most uncomfortable pseudo-dramatic sketch of the theatrical season. Even the better numbers have a tendency to run too long, and the cumulative effect of a whole evening of this sort of thing takes on an unhappy monotony. I still think that Jimmy Savo is a fine comedian, but the test he puts himself to in "Mum's the Word" is unfair to him.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *December 6, 1940*

Jimmy Savo Appears in His Own One-Man Revue, 'Mum's the Word'

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

JIMMY SAVO is one of our funniest clowns, and there are many worse ways to spend an evening than in his undiluted company. Dozens of people have crowded one another on the stage and not been half so amusing as Mr. Savo is, all by himself. This is just as well, since Mr. Savo embarked on the perilous seas of solo entertainment last evening at the little Belmont Theater.

Mr. Savo, with Hiram Sherman to announce for him in Mr. Sherman's own droll fashion, constitutes a one-man revue. He calls it "Mum's the Word," although Mr. Savo is not entirely mum. He says nothing, except with gestures, but now and again he prevails on himself to sing in a small, mad voice. He is otherwise assisted by a piano, from which emerges music by Chopin, Beethoven and "a good many others," tampered with by Mr. Savo.

And what does Mr. Savo do? Well, he rolls his eyes wickedly and widens them lecherously. He arrays himself in Chinese costume, keeping his familiar old shoes, and utilizes the occasion to sing "Lady Bird, Lady Bird, Fly Away Home." His broad face glistens. Emotions, mostly of surprised alarm and leering comprehension, pass over it in waves. He goes fishing with a magnet and is lured away by a mermaid. In one of his funniest sketches he cuts open a dummy, while substituting for a doctor, and finds the oddest things inside. In long underwear, he is Eve in the garden; in a tattered suit he is a vagabond down on his luck. Mr. Savo can be serious on occasion, but this is never, I think, as good an idea as he imagines. When Mr. Savo hits the tragic note, he wallops it.

So he goes on from one thing to another. He makes a dozen appearances, with the dryly innocent Mr. Sherman announcing each. And there is not one, except the two which find him pretty grim, which does not yield at least one fine, hearty laugh and an assortment of broadish grins. And yet—

Well, if any one wants to argue that this sort of thing requires from the audience a rare kind of determination to be amused, this correspondent will not argue back. You have to set yourself to laugh, and keep yourself up to the mark. Spontaneity dwindles as the evening advances. You begin to wish there were two of Mr. Savo, or three or four. And a full orchestra wouldn't hurt. Some girls would be all right. You begin looking eagerly for the rest of the show, because a full evening is a long time to laugh at one man, on one note, even if he is Mr. Savo. Too long, I guess.

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"Delicate Story"

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM, *December 5, 1940*

Molnar's Delicate Story Is a Charming Comedy

By SIDNEY B. WHIPPLE

FERENC MOLNAR'S new play, a charming comedy of bourgeois morals called Delicate Story, is as fragile as its name and as light as the pastry that is sold in Henry Cristof's delicatessen store where its scenes are laid.

Mr. Molnar, who has never yet made a pretense about heavy significance in anything he has written—including Liliom—has refused to grow cynical, or disillusioned or even extremely critical of the world or its people. His play, the first he has written since his arrival in America, might have been composed in Vienna of happier times.

Gilbert Miller and Vinton Freedley, who produced Delicate Story at Henry Miller's Theatre last night gave it an appropriate cast, which is to say that the actors were exquisitely suited to their parts, that they responded with keen intelligence to the happy humor of Mr. Molnar's bright lines, and that the whole production was as well mannered as any of the season's offerings thus far.

* * *

Delicate Story is not, and probably does not pretend to be, another Liliom. In some respects its story is so attenuated that the play is held together only by an occasional flash of wit or a piece of characterization that rescues it from danger. And it is in characterization of the little people with whom Mr. Molnar delights to play, that he is supreme.

There are only three important figures in Delicate Story. They are the proprietor of the little Swiss delicatessen shop, his wife, Mary, and the third corner of the triangle, Oliver Odry. The grocer himself may be regarded as a typical conception of an unromantic, steady, honest and dutiful tradesman. Mr. Molnar adds other qualities, including a surprising acumen, an unsuspected tenderness and a little pathos. The grocer's wife might be the prototype of the heroine of Chekhov's short story, Love—a roly-poly, romantic, generous soul, and one touched with singular lightheadedness in or out of a crisis. The young man is a confused and unwilling lover, and the situation thus brought about leads back to the mythological chase by an over-heafed Venus of a phlegmatic and recalcitrant Adonis.

In Mr. Molnar's story, Mrs. Cristof finds noble justification for her pursuit of the boy in the fact that he has been summoned to the army and has only a few more days in which to enjoy life. She will do her best for mankind, she solemnly asserts, by making him happy during those few days. And not even her husband's rather sensible declaration that he doubts very much whether she is really sacrificing anything when she is indulging in such pursuits, can ever quite convince her that her proposed part in the war is not one of the highest humanitarian impulse.

* *

Edna Best gave a performance, in this role, of sheer delight. She was utterly feminine, in the sense that she brought out, with relish, all of the irrational, unforgivable—and lovable—qualities that Molnar habitually reads into the sex.

An exceptionally clear-cut, well-defined and realistic characterization of the grocer was given by Jay Fassett. There was real authority in his performance. Young John Craven, as the unwitting lover, seems to grow in acting stature every time I see him. There was more maturity in his acting, more confidence, and the evident acquisition of some individual mannerisms that are becoming to him. This was the third outstanding performance of the evening.

In a brief sketch (interpolated like a piece of vaudeville) Harry Gribbon's impersonation of a police captain provoked outbursts of appreciative laughter, a tribute to the acting as well as to the universality of Mr. Molnar's humor.

If you expect something spectacular from this new work by a much loved playwright, you will be disappointed. If you expect a chuckling evening in the theater, you will receive a just reward.

'DELICATE STORY'

A comedy in six scenes by Ferenc Molnar; translated and staged by Gilbert Miller; settings by Raymond Sovey; presented at Henry Miller's Theater on December 4, 1940, by Mr. Miller and Vinton Freedley. The cast:

Mary Cristof	Edna Best
Mrs. Lacroix	Katherine Grey
Oliver Odry	John Craven
Tony	Alfred Etcheverry
Frank	Milton Nell
Baron	Arnold Korff
Mrs. Gola	May Thomas
Henry Cristof	Jay Fassett
Pip	Norman Tokar
First Cristof Child	Howard Sherman
Second Cristof Child	Norma Clerc
Third Cristof Child	Haldor De Becker
Mrs. Benard	Carlotta Nilsson
Summons Server	Leslie King
Little Girl	Patsy O'Shea
Police Captain	Harry Gribbon
Office Attendant	Gordon Nelson
Laborer	Thomas Brown
College Girl	Natalie Thompson
Mrs. Clermont	Florence Fair
Servant Girl	Jacqueline Clarke
Physician	Harry Irvine

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *December 5, 1940*

Molnar's 'Delicate Story' Brings Edna Best to Town Under Gilbert Miller's Direction

By BROOKS ATKINSON

EIGHT years have vanished into thin air since Molnar's last new play appeared on Broadway; civilizations have tumbled. Among others the Hungarian civilization has faltered, turning Molnar into one of the most distinguished refugees in this country. If it is hard for a boulevardier to be torn away from his favorite coffee-shops, there is no sign of it in his "Delicate Story," whch was charmingly acted at Henry Miller's last evening.

For Molnar has taken a slight anecdote with romantic implications, spun it thin with grace and quizzical humor and sighed a little for his lovers in the last act, just as he used to do when the world was callow. Gilbert Miller has not only translated it, but staged it with matchless dexterity, and Edna Best, who has also been absent for eight years, has returned to play a grocer's wife enchantingly. Nothing has changed, save the world and the audience, and nothing seems more ungrateful than a suggestion here that even the most accomplished style is not quite enough today.

* * *

Oh, there is a martial note sounded gently in the first act. For Oliver Odry, who is drinking beer in a Swiss delicatessen store, has been drafted for the army in the European country from which he comes, and to the grocer's romantic wife he is a martyr worth comforting. That is the origin of their little affair, which floats in and out of a bourgeois delicatessen store, perplexes the customers, alarms the grocer and finally explodes with a humorous report.

A superb writer of small themes, Molnar weaves the whole thing into a soft texture of stolen ardors and domestic crises. Although he tells his story in slight duologues, he knows how to drop a querulous police captain into a dull spot for casual humor, how to push three children off to school with felicitous by-play and how to work the minor part of a garrulous young apprentice into a most ingratiating comment on character. He is master of the pastry style. Although the filling is thin, the icing is succulent.

* * *

"Delicate Story" could not be better produced or acted. With the cooperation of Raymond Sovey, who has designed some bright and attractive settings, Gilbert Miller has overlaid the play with the soft luster of well-bred stage craftsmanship. Edna Best, lucid and lucent, plays the grocer's wife with great skill, carrying the part through a series of crises without jostling or spilling a drop of sentiment. Jay Fassett, who becomes a better actor year by year, plays the sulky, dull-minded grocer with full appreciation of the character's unwitting humors. As the love-crossed boy, John Craven is pleasant in the early scenes, but excellent at the end, when the part gives him something to do. Harry Gribbon plays the brief part of the police captain with extraordinary relish of the amusement hidden in the dialogue. Arnold Korff, Harry Irvine, Norman Tokar and several others complete an impeccably chosen and directed cast.

All and sundry conspire with Molnar in an effort to keep dullness at bay until 11 o'clock. But dullness hangs over the little brightnesses that they improvise and cultivate, for, alas, there is a rueful dullness at the center of things.

"Delicate Story"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *December 5, 1940*

Edna Best in Molnar's "Delicate Story"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IF THE PROGRAM at the Henry Miller did not name Ference Molnar as the author, you would never guess that "Delicate Story" is a play written by the creator of "The Guardsman," "The Swan," "The Play's the Thing," and "The Good Fairy." These earlier Molnar comedies were trifles, if you will. But their trifling was so felicitous as to be their point.

The better of them managed to make a great deal out of nothing. One remembers them affectionately for the sparkle and ingenuity of their writing no less than; because of the skill with which they were performed hereabouts. Their trivialities were gaily stated. They had movement and suavity. in their time they seemed as joyous as they were sophisticated. One forgot they were soap bubbles and thought with delight only of the colors they had caught.

But "Delicate Story," though a comedy written in the lighter vein of that playwright who with "Liliom" contributed notably to the serious drama of our time, has none of the smiling virtues one expects of a Molnar comedy. Out of nothing it makes less than nothing.

Its heroine is a woman described all too accurately as a silly little shopkeeper. Her husband is a dull fellow, the owner of a delicatessen store in Switzerland. In a romantic moment of dedication, his wife, feeling that a woman can lessen the tragedy of the modern world only by being kind to the young men who are doomed to die in battle, falls breathlessly in love with a fellow who has been called home to active duty. Her affair causes pain both to her jealous husband and to herself because in spite of many feeble complications, it turns out that the foreigner in question has all the time been in love with a girl just across the street whom he ultimately marries.

Too Bad

As a one-act sketch (which it is said originally to have been), "Delicate Story" might have proved unobjectionable in Mr. Kozlenko's magazine. It might even have had quality. But as a long play it suffers—as suffer it must and so does the audience—from having tried to turn a sparrow's egg into a blimp.

Its action refuses to last for three acts. It stretches about as far as a string of spaghetti would if used as a trans-Atlantic cable. In one short scene at a police court things begin to grow brighter. But the evening as a whole is a dire one. Its talk, which is dull at best, is as repetitious as if it were a long series of echoes. Each of its scant jokes is encored as many times as are the songs in a bad Gilbert & Sullivan revival.

Edna Best, a charming actress with a definite quality of magic about her, brings her genuine skill to playing the silly little shopkeeper. Jay Fassett wins an occasional laugh as her stolid husband. And John Craven (who is wretchedly miscast), Harry Irvine, and Harry Gribbon (who is excellent as a police captain) are on hand in a populous though on the whole uncontributive, company. But the resulting patisserie is just about as light as an eclair must have been in any Johnstown confectionery right after the flood broke loose.

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *December 5, 1940*

Ferenc Molnar's 'Delicate Story' Opens at Henry Miller's Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

FERENC MOLNAR calls his newest play, which opened last evening at Henry Miller's Theater, "Delicate Story" and this is in the nature of an understatement. Mr. Molnar's comedy tells a story which is not only delicate, but virtually imperceptible. It is drama reduced to the vanishing point. Its dialogue is a fine mist, swirling in gentle eddies. Its action has the slow motion of a hazy dream.

There is, of course, a certain wistful charm in much of it. Mr. Molnar, although he may write plays merely, as this one must have been written, for practice, is never entirely routine. Amusing characters drift into "Delicate Story" and drift away again. A quaint policeman has an odd, amusing conversation with a worried delicatessen dealer. A comical shop assistant announces the arrival of spring in ringing accents and is gloomily chided by his employer. Three pleasant children are given instruction about street crossing and cheerful customers visit a little store in Switzerland.

The story idles its way among these incidents. The pretty wife of the delicatessen dealer fancies a young soldier, about to report across a border for active service, to be in love with her. He is too polite to explain. Her husband is stormy when he suspects too much; the wife is gently prostrated when she is tenderly rebuffed. Mr. Molnar has to strain a little to extend this incident through six scenes and a scant two hours, but by filling his dialogue with hesitations he just manages it.

It would be foolish to argue that he does much more. "Delicate Story" is a wisp of a play and its charm is faint and distant. It is not very tedious, but it is certainly not very amusing. It is difficult to see how Mr. Molnar could remember it long enough to write it down, or Gilbert Miller and Vinton Freedley see it clearly enough to produce it. It must often have seemed to be the little play that wasn't there.

Miss Edna Best is required to be rather silly in the first scene, but afterward manages to act the part of the wandering wife with peaceful charm. Jay Fassett is comfortingly solid and definite as the husband. John Craven's underplaying of the role of the boy matches Mr. Molnar's under-writing of the script. Harry Gribbon expends some dryly humorous playing on the incidentl role of a police captain and the others in the cast behave properly. It is all something of a waste of time, however.

Critics'

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Critics'

Theatre Reviews

"Delicate Story"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *December 5, 1940*

"Delicate Story," Fragile Plot, Plus Satisfying Actors

"Delicate Story," comedy by Ferenc Molnar, adapted by Gilbert Miller. Produced by Mr. Miller and Vinton Freedley at Henry Miller's Theatre, New York, Dec. 4, 1940.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

MARY CRISTOF was a Swiss romantic who wanted to help mankind. Not quite so seriously as did heroine Nina of Eugene O'Neill's "Strange Interlude," but with something of the same reasoning and a good deal of the same enthusiasm.

It was Mary's idea, as she relates it in Ferenc Molnar's "Delicate Story," revealed at Henry Miller's Theatre last night, that if she had a chance to be kind and sympathetic and took a personal interest in brave young men who were about to go to war, probably never to return, she would be doing her bit.

She tried it on six of them, and it worked, considerably to her satisfaction and apparently without doing anybody any harm. But the seventh adventure tripped Mary. She fell in love with the young man.

When Mary's stodgy husband found out there was, naturally, a scene. But it wasn't much of a scene. Rather more comical than dramatic—to everybody except Mary.

So it was with the conclusion of the adventure—more comic than tragic. Again to everybody except Mary.

Edna Best's Return

Edna Best plays Mary. And if you happen to remember her—she hasn't been here since she played in "There's Always Juliet" in 1932, —if you remember Miss Best as gratefully and admiringly as many of us do you will know that Mary Cristof is in good hands.

There is nothing grandly heroic, or nobly theatrical about Miss Best. She is just a sweet and lovable human who can wrinkle her nose and dab her eyes with tiny handkerchiefs, and turn her head and suffer quietly with complete conviction.

She can be eagerly romantic and prettily sentimental, and it doesn't greatly matter whether her excuse for being either is convincing or important theatre. The evening spent with her in the theatre is, with just a little help from the playwright, pleasantly spent.

Gilbert Miller has adapted Mr. Molnar's comedy, and done it well, it seems to me. The Hungarian master of light romance has been writing "Delicate Story" in this country, we're told, but I suspect assembling would be a better description than writing.

Story Interest

"Delicate Story" impresses me as being compounded of a collection of Molnar scenes that have been variously used in other comedies and with success. But there are also original twists, and the story interest is tenuously but definitely sustained.

Last night's audience chuckled with satisfaction most of the time. There were no big moments, but there were charming touches and a satisfied feeling that the play had fallen into the hands of people of taste and understanding in the theatre who knew what to do with it.

Jay Fassett plays opposite Miss Best as the dull delicatessen proprietor who is her husband. Another excellent performance. Mr. Miller has elected to strip him of dialect and other familiar aids to the cheaper comedies. This limits an actor's opportunities but it makes for a certain consistency.

John Craven plays the somewhat embarrassed young soldier upon whom the romantic Mary's affections settle. He is a good type for the role, earnest and youthfully detached from his middle-aged admirer's infatuation.

Mr. Miller has considerately given short parts to some old-time favorites—Arnold Korff, Katherine Grey, Carlotta Nillson, Harry Irvine among them. Harry Gribbon and Norman Tokar also help. The setting is a fine shop interior by Raymond Sovey and the direction by Mr. Miller.

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *December 5, 1940*

Mr. Molnar Nods

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE famous theatrical cunning of Ferenc Molnar has deserted him in "Delicate Story." Ordinarily gifted with an enviable talent for taking a passably thin plot and keeping it spinning brightly in the air for an entire evening, the eminent Hungarian visitor to our shores this time fails with remarkable completeness to get his narrative off the ground at all. The current comedy has been expanded from a one-act play and, after seeing it, my impression is that the one-act play couldn't have been very good, either. The dull and slightly embarrassing tale of the sentimental wife of a crotchety delicatessen dealer and how she foolishly believes that a young man has fallen in love with her, "Delicate Story" moves with almost unrelieved heaviness to an uncomfortable conclusion.

• • •

There is only one scene of any considerable interest in the new play, and it is but incidentally connected with the central plot. It is an episode wherein the fatuous husband visits a police station to find out why his wife has been given a summons. The important thing is not that he discovers by this means that his wife has been out with her young man when she was supposed to have been visiting her mother. What is of concern to the humors of the evening is that he encounters a fussy and rather motherly police captain, who is more interested in telling the visitor what is wrong with his calling card than he is in affairs of law and order, and that the entire incident is human and amusing in an agreeably original way. The disappearance after that scene of Harry Gribbon, the ex-Keystone comic, who plays the captain so delightfully, is one of the great mistakes of "Delicate Story."

• • •

If "Delicate Story" has any point it is that it reveals Molnar in some rather oblique comments on war and the state of the modern world. The "action," as it might be laughably called, of the play takes place in Switzerland in the early days of the war and the young man of the tale is about to go back to his unnamed native country to fight. It is because the wife is so sympathetic about what she regards as his certain death and feels that it is the duty of all good women to come to the aid of young soldiers, if they are handsome enough, that in the first place motivates her sentimental attachment for him. This, say Molnar and his delicatessen man, is her romantic but rather touching reaction to the conflagration of the world, and I must say that it is the extent of the playwright's contribution to the universal crisis, also.

• • •

In a mild way, "Delicate Story" bears a family resemblance to that remarkable French film, "The Baker's Wife," but any comparison is bound to be so embarrassing to both Mr. Molnar and the theater that I prefer to pass on to the matter of the acting. It is much better than the play, which is less of a compliment than the players deserve. Miss Edna Best, returning after a long absence, is believable and rather touching in the embarrassing role of the wife, who, whether Molnar meant it or not, turns out to be merely the butt of a bad joke. Jay Fassett is properly pompous, stuffy and well meaning as the husband, and John Craven is correctly sensitive and sympathetic as the young man who is the unwilling object of the heroine's romantic fantasies. In bit roles Arnold Korff, who deserves better things, Norman Tokar, Leslie King and Harry Irvine are helpful. But it is Harry Gribbon, who is the one joy of an uncomfortable evening.

"Romantic Mr. Dickens"

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *December 3, 1940*

Unhappy Mr. Dickens

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

THE chief thing that the new drama at the Playhouse has to tell us of the late Charles Dickens is that the domestic squabbles at his home were exceptionally dull. The play by H. H. and Marguerite Harper has other matters with which to regale us, but the final memory to be carried away from the theater is of an infinite series of tedious episodes wherein Mrs. Dickens was shrewish and suspicious and Mr. Dickens was hot-tempered and impetuous, and hot, dull words of mutual recrimination were tossed about with ponderous violence and to great soporific effect. The stage is rarely successful in its efforts to show us the private lives of the literary great, but rarely has it been less triumphant than it is in "Romantic Mr. Dickens." As an old-fashioned enthusiast for the works of the author of "David Copperfield" and the adventures of Mr. Pickwick, I found the evening particularly distressing.

* * *

If you are here anticipating any discussion of the authenticity of the play as to its biographical details I am afraid that I will disappoint you even more than usual. Perhaps the work is as nearly accurate in its facts as the authors insist that it is. The point is that "Romantic Mr. Dickens" is so dull and wooden and aimless that it doesn't make any difference whether it is telling the truth or not. The picture is of Dickens as a roving and unhappy romantic who had a way of falling in love with dull and waspish women. He loved Dora in his youth, wrote of her wistfully in "David Copperfield" and met her in later years to find her fat and disillusioning. His wife was an unbearable shrew; another woman who loved him was an unpleasant sneak; the young actress he loved in later years was shallow and given to breaking his heart. All in all, he had little fun in his romances, and I am afraid that audiences are likely to share the same lack of entertainment with him.

* * *

The chief method the play uses to show you that its hero is a writer is to provide him with a quill pen and to have him talk about his works from time to time. Its central figure is never persuasive as either a literary artist or as a human being. Robert Keith plays the role of the great man industriously enough, but the unbelievable character he is playing remains an unbelievable character. The series of dull viragoes who come into Mr. Dickens's life are played by Miss Gertrude Flynn as the fatuous Dora, by Miss Zolya Talma as the disagreeable wife and by Miss Mary Heberden as a treacherous and lovelorn ex-admirer of the author. Making her debut as Mr. Dickens's young actress friend is Miss Diana Barrymore, daughter of such assorted players as John Barrymore and Michael Strange. She performs prettily and may conceivably be worthy of better parts. If even after "Romantic Mr. Dickens" I can still read this admirable author's works, it will certainly be a tribute to him.

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *December 3, 1940*

Robert Keith Seen in "Romantic Mr. Dickens"

By JOHN MASON BROWN

ALTHOUGH Charles Dickens loved the theatre with a love which inspired some of his best pages and tormented him throughout his life, it seems certain he would have found no pleasure in the dull theatricals which used him as their hero at the Playhouse last night.

He, who had always been tempted by acting, had there in "Romantic Mr. Dickens," become at last a professional actor. Very much a professional actor in the person of Robert Keith—and nothing more. The creator of the Crummles family was no longer a great novelist; he had emerged merely as an Equity member. His voice was a flat modern American voice. His clothes of the 1830's and '50's had ceased to be clothes and become costumes. Indeed, the beardless young genius of the Maclise painting, with his flowing locks, high forehead, and far-seeing eyes, had ended up by being so irretrievably Broadway's Mr. Robert Keith that Dickens never once put in his appearance at the Playhouse.

The Dickens Mr. Keith replaced so unsparingly in a physical way last night was kept intellectually offstage with an equal violence. Because, although H. H. and Marguerite Harper claim to have based their biographical drama on "autograph love letters from Charles Dickens to the original of Dora in 'David Copperfield' " plus unpublished materials to be found in and out of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts' collection, their well-meant researches have resulted in the feeblest of feeble plays.

Theirs is a saga which attempts to show how Dickens in his quest for true love was frustrated, first, by his poverty; then, by his fame. It pictures the unhappiness of his home life when, having been thwarted in his first romance, he had married a woman who did not understand him and only nagged him the more when he became interested in a young actress identified at the Playhouse as Caroline Bronson.

Dickens Made Dreary

A major trouble with "Romantic Mr. Dickens" is that it leaves its home-work in a condition just about as private as the sources upon which it drew. Instead of adding to our understanding of Dickens, it ends up by subtracting from our interest in him. The pity is that it is written by two devoted students who, in addition to having no aptitude whatsoever for the theatre, have produced in their script a Dickens whose only literary talent is a genius for embarrassing cliches.

All in all the evening is a distressing one. Its one bright feature is Diana Barrymore, that very pretty daughter of Michael Strange and John Barrymore who, though she has presence and is agreeable, still remains a stage debutante who has much to learn.

The truth is that the Harpers' play does more to kill Dickens than his public readings ever did.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *December 3, 1940*

'Romantic Mr. Dickens' Gives Diana Barrymore Her First Broadway Part

By BROOKS ATKINSON

WAS Dickens a writer? Most people have been laboring under that impression. But "Romantic Mr. Dickens," which was put on at the Playhouse last evening, will not make many readers for "Pickwick" or "David Copperfield." For H. H. and Marguerite Harper, the authors, are interested chiefly in his middle-aged philanderings with the memory of Dora and the ecstatic reality of Caroline Bronson. In a program note they describe their sources as Dickens's love letters to Dora and confidential letters and documents from the private collection of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts.

* * *

Doubtless the facts of "Romantic Mr. Dickens" are accurate enough to keep Dickensians satisfied. But Mr. and Mrs. Harper are pedestrian writers with considerable fondness for cliches. And the impression their drama creates is of a stuffy stock broker on an amorous fling out of office hours. If Mr. and Mrs. Harper wanted to prove that Dickens's love affairs are a matter of no importance they could not do his reputation a better service. Hereafter the novels will be the only thing any one will remember about his meteoric career.

No one man ought to have as much bad luck as pursues him in this play. Mrs. Dickens is bad enough, upbraiding him bitterly every time she crosses the stage. But his sister-in-law's cloying adoration is no great improvement. Fat Dora in her forties is a simpering fool, and spiteful Marianne Leigh is a cat of deadly ingenuity. Until Caroline Bronson, the attractive actress, turns up Dickens is not only unhappy but a tremendous bore. After that he is a good deal like the romantic hero in a poorly written play.

Say this much for "Romantic Mr. Dickens": It represents the Broadway debut of Diana Barrymore, daughter of the illustrious profile and Michael Strange. Miss Barrymore is a vibrant young lady with an excellent speaking voice. As Caroline Bronson she gives a romantic performance that is surprisingly accomplished and that lifts the play out of the doldrums. This is the best Barrymore debut for some time. Robert Keith plays Mr. Dickens as if all those books had been turned out by hired hands in some monumental word-works. Watson Barratt has provided a hospitable living room in the Victorian style and Ernest Schraps has found agreeably lively colors for the costumes. But "Romantic Mr. Dickens" as a play is like the dramatization of a skeleton. It will encourage the miscreants who complain that Dickens is dull.

"Romantic Mr. Dickens"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *December 3, 1940*

'Romantic Mr. Dickens,' Stage Biography, Opens at the Playhouse

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

THE authors of "Romantic Mr. Dickens," which opened last evening at the Playhouse, share the rather common illusion that writers are strange and fascinating beings and that the stories of their lives are bound to be of peculiar interest. There was abundant evidence to the contrary even before last evening, and to it "Romantic Mr. Dickens" adds its mite. If this was Dickens, he was a vague and foolish man.

H. H. and Marguerite Harper, who wrote the play, have gone to sources and no doubt their facts are right. They show us Dickens as a youth, a shade unconvincingly in love with Dora Spenlow. They show us Dickens as a mature man, in love with Dora's memory until he meets Dora in the disconcertingly solid flesh. They let us glimpse Mr. Dickens as the noisy dictator of the drawing room, and finally they portray him sentimentally in love with a pretty young actress, with everybody renouncing in time for the final curtain.

The point of view of the Harpers toward all this is exceedingly vague, and neither Dickens nor the other important characters have any inner coherence. The authors alternately laugh at their hero, picturing him as a pompous, fretful little man, and moodily yearn over him in his love affairs. Their sympathy hovers uncertainly, lighting for a moment on Dickens's shoulders, then fluttering off to pass a hand over the furrowed brow of Mrs. Dickens. Mrs. Dickens's brow had occasion to furrow. It was no fun living with the author of "David Copperfield" and "Pickwick" and "Bleak House."

Probably it wasn't. But now and then, amid all his frivolous carryings-on, there must have been something—a turn of phrase, perhaps, or a sudden insight—to reveal the fairly prodigious novelist he also was. There is nothing of that in "Romantic Mr. Dickens." There he is only the silly central character of a long-winded and barren play. He is merely a sentimentalist with extremely bad manners, and very dull to listen to. The fact that he now and again sits down in the center of a crowded drawing room and dashes off a few words doesn't make him a bit more interesting or, if you come to that, more probable.

Otherwise the evening belonged pretty much to Robert Keith, who managed to give the Mr. Dickens of the title enough character to overcome the handicap of a flashy Victorian wardrobe and an assortment of as commonplace lines as any biographical hero has been handed within memory.

The Harpers, having come upon some previously unpublished love letters which the author wrote to the Dora Spenlow of "David Copperfield," have elected to fill out that romance and add a more important item concerned with his love for, though they do not go into the affair with, an actress named in his will as Ellen Lawless Ternan.

Their play presents Dickens as the struggling "scribbler" of his garret days, still pestered by memories of his family's experience living in a debtors' prison and the refusal of publishers to buy his stories. Here he meets and loses his Dora.

Twenty Years Later

They jump over the next twenty years to present a picture of their hero's unhappy home life, punctuated with a series of quarrels with the unsympathetic and misunderstanding Mrs. Dickens. Again Dora comes into the picture, now a fat and frumpish lady who completely crushes the Dickens illusions.

Here, too, he meets the actress, called Caroline Bronson, and a new love blossoms. His biographers leave him then, following an additional row or two with a jealous wife, when he has staged a play with Caroline as the leading woman and been forced to renounce his love for her to save his reputation and make secure his future.

The play, as said, adds nothing to the character of Dickens worth adding, reveals nothing worth revealing, and gives little or nothing to the theatre.

The performance is competent, with Zolya Talma playing a believable irritation as Mrs. D, Thais Lawson adding an authoritative touch as the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, Gertrude Flynn making effective capital of the contrasted Doras.

Good performances, too, by Mary Heberden, Elwyne Harvey, and Lawrence Fletcher. And a couple of nice settings by Watson Barratt. Arthur Sircom, who directed, probably got as much from the text as there was in it.

Miss Diana, daughter of John Barrymore and of Michael Strange, was making her New York debut in her father's profession, which she has elected to follow.

She is a pretty girl of 19, well poised, of gentle, cultivated voice and manner and evidently possessed of a feeling as well as a talent for the theatre. Her first role calls for no more than any competent ingenue has to give, but there is a suggestion of both confidence and competence in her stage presence that leads me to believe that she will, if she is as strong in determination as she is otherwise fortified, do her paternal line full credit as an actress.

Robert Keith acts the title role for all he is worth and I do not believe it is his fault that no character emerges from his earnest, emphatic efforts. Uncertain characterization hampers the others in the cast also. But Mary Heberden is harshly realistic as a woman who lives only to cause trouble, and Gertrude Flynn is momentarily entertaining as the over-matured Dora.

Zolya Talma achieves considerable reality as the worried Mrs. Dickens, and several of the small parts, about which the authors didn't give themselves time to grow confused, are pleasantly acted. Diana Barrymore, daughter of John, makes her New York debut as Dickens's youngest love and is pretty and sincere. She has only two gestures, however. Bigger Barymores have more. Often, too, they have better plays.

'ROMANTIC MR. DICKENS'

A play in three acts by H. H. and Marguerite Harper; staged by Arthur Sircom; settings by Watson Barratt; costumes by Earnest Schraps; presented at the Playhouse on December 2, 1940, by John Tuerk. The cast:

Martha	Emily Lorraine
Dora Spenlow	Gertrude Flynn
Marianne Leigh	Mary Heberden
Henry Kolle	Lawrence Fletcher
Charles Dickens	Robert Keith
Timmy	Lackland Campbell
Mr. Spenlow	Marshall Bradford
Mrs. Charles Dickens	Zolya Talma
Georgina Hogarth	Elwyne Harvey
Mr. Twilling	Roland Hogue
Baroness Burdett-Coutts	Thais Lawton
A Girl	Marita Sylva
A Lady-of-the-Evening	Cathleen Cordell
Caroline Bronson	Diana Barrymore
Colonel Phipps	Tom Bate
Governess	Ann Drury
Lackey	Alan Raymond

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *December 3, 1940*

'Romantic Mr. Dickens' Scant Aid To History, and Less to the Drama

"Romantic Mr. Dickens," drama by H. H. and Marguerite Harper. Produced by John Tuerk at the Playhouse, Dec. 2, 1940.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

TROUBLE with the romantic Mr. Dickens is that he is not nearly so interesting as the accepted Mr. Dickens. Take away his whiskers and the authority of his later years and he is no more than a rather dull young man with wife and girl trouble.

The most exciting moment of the proceedings at the Playhouse last night, where "Romantic Mr. Dickens," the biographical drama by H. H. and Marguerite Harper, was staged, came at the end of the second act when Diana Barrymore walked into the action.